

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**ALABAMA ESTABLISHING INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL
EXCHANGE WITH PIETRASANTA, ITALY IN JUNE 2008**

Montgomery, Ala. – Al Head, Executive Director of the Alabama State Council on the Arts announced the establishment of an international cultural exchange with Pietrasanta, Italy and Alabama beginning June 2008. According to Mr. Head, “Even though separated by great distance, language and history, the State of Alabama and the City of Pietrasanta, Italy have much to share and celebrate. Our people appreciate great art; know the arts elevate the joy of living and value culture as an essential element of community life. Our common threads bring us together and our differences present opportunities to learn from one another.”

Over the years numerous Alabama sculptors have traveled to Pietrasanta to have their work cast at the world famous foundries that are so much a part of the city’s history. It was through these artists, in particular Nall, the Alabama State Council on the Arts was introduced to Pietrasanta and conversations about cultural exchange first began. The dedication of Nall’s “Peace Frame” in August 2007 was part of ceremonies officially declaring a cultural exchange relationship between Alabama and Pietrasanta.

In June 2008, the cultural exchange begins with the state’s art and artists arriving in Italy to share an “Alabama Experience” with the artists and people of Pietrasanta. Exhibitions of story-quilts, photographs, sculpture, architecture and other images of the state will fill gallery spaces. Alabama musicians will present jazz, blues, bluegrass, gospel and traditional music indigenous to the South. Internationally acclaimed films telling Alabama stories about people, events and the history of the state will be featured. Alabama literature and works of the state’s writers will be discussed and read with the classic, “To Kill A Mockingbird” being a central work for attention. Those in the Alabama delegation will address topics such as civil rights and southern culture. It is our sincere desire to share the personality, past and present, of the State of Alabama as represented through arts.

Two officials in Pietrasanta, Italy helped to make this arts exchange possible. Mayor Massimo Mallegni and Commissioner of Culture, Daniele Spina extended great assistance and hospitality to the Alabama delegation visiting Pietrasanta for this monumental exchange of good will and rich culture. The Council on the Arts and the arts community in Alabama are looking forward with great enthusiasm to hosting “Little Athens” in the Capital City of Montgomery in 2009 rounding out this unique exchange experience. The Council believes it is laying the foundation for many years of cooperation, collaboration and celebration with Pietrasanta.

Governor Bob Riley expressed, “As Governor of the State of Alabama, I share the enthusiasm of our arts community and a broad range of public officials regarding the establishment of a cultural exchange with the City of Pietrasanta, Italy. Our state is rich in the arts and diverse cultural resources. In June of this year we are eager to share some of our best artists with the fine people of Pietrasanta. As well, we are looking forward with great anticipation to hosting a group of Italian artists and officials to Alabama in 2009.”

Governor Riley went on to say, “We are aware that significant potential exists in the area of educational opportunities, artistic production, community partnerships and creative programming. I am particularly hopeful about the bridges that can be built in the international sculpting community given the world famous Carrara marble industry in the Pietrasanta region and the fine marble quarries in the Sylacauga region of Alabama. In all areas of the arts, visual, performing and literary, much can be learned and gained by collaborating and exchanging natural and human resources.”

“First Lady Patsy Riley joins with me in extending the hand of friendship and good will in this unique cultural exchange. Alabama is constantly expanding its base of international partners, which is having a positive impact economically, culturally and educationally. We are optimistic this arts oriented exchange will have benefits to all segments of our respective populations far into the future. Our very best wishes go out to all involved in this first year of sharing and programming. We hope the people of Pietrasanta will get a taste of why Alabamians love their state and the arts that reflect its beauty, history and southern culture,” said Governor Riley.

The Alabama Delegation to Pietrasanta:

Government Officials

Councilman Jim Spears, City of Montgomery, representing Mayor Bobby Bright

Mayor Sam Wright, City of Sylacauga

Lee Sentell, State Director, Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel Cultural Representatives

Al Head, Executive Director, Alabama State Council on the Arts

Ralph Frohsin, Chairman, Alabama State Council on the Arts

Mark Johnson, Director, Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts

Paige Wainwright, Director, Metal Arts Program, Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark, Birmingham

Glenn Dasher, sculptor and Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, University of Alabama in Huntsville

Jeanie Thompson, Executive Director, Alabama Writers' Forum

Staff, Alabama State Council on the Arts: Georgine Clarke, Randy Shoults, Steve Grauberger.

EXHIBITIONS FROM ALABAMA TO PIETRASANTA

BROTHERS: AN ART COLLABORATION

Artists Charlie Lucas and Bruce Larsen (brothers in spirit) will travel to Pietrasanta to create an exhibition using objects they find to create sculptures, which will be a gift to Pietrasanta from the State of Alabama. Each of these men has a significant reputation in the United States, and earlier this year they decided to work together for an exhibition at the Eastern Shore Art Center in Fairhope.

SELMA TO MONTGOMERY: A MARCH FOR THE RIGHT TO VOTE

This exhibition honors history with the photography of Spider Martin installed with letterpress posters by Amos Paul Kennedy, Jr., and mosaic crosses by artist Nall. Tracy Martin, who will be in Pietrasanta for the Cultural Exchange, has graciously loaned prints of her father's historic photography. Congressman John Lewis has said, "In viewing Spider's collection, one is literally walking through the pages of American History."

STITCHING HISTORY: THE STORY QUILTS OF YVONNE WELLS

The twenty quilts in this exhibition are not traditional pieces made for use as bedcovers. They are hand stitched fabric constructions by artist Yvonne Wells that can be hung as tapestries and that use rich symbolism and vivid colors to tell stories and offer comments on social and political issues. The pieces selected here show the history of her people, from the slave ships and auction block to the successful protests of Rosa Parks and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Other pieces show her religious faith and the faith of her people throughout the struggle for freedom, ending with the Ten Commandments as a statement of love and justice. Yvonne Wells will be in Pietrasanta with her quilts.

THE STORY OF ALABAMA'S OFFICIAL QUILT: Pine BURR QUILT

The Pine Burr Quilt was designated the official quilt of the State of Alabama by the Legislature in 1997. This quilt represents the traditions and history of the people. It also honors the Freedom Quilting Bee, a women's cooperative organized as an outgrowth of the Civil Rights Movement.

This special quilt inspired the logo design for "The Year of Alabama Arts," a yearlong celebration of the arts of Alabama during 2007.

MUSIC FROM ALABAMA TO PIETRASANTA

The Birmingham Sunlights

The members of The Birmingham Sunlights are keepers of one of the richest regional traditions in American music: the art of unaccompanied (a cappella) four-part gospel harmony singing. Music director James Alex Taylor, along with his brothers Barry and Steve, founded the group in 1979 and are joined by Bill Graves and Wayne Williams in performing well-known hymns as well as original gospel compositions. Their home city, Birmingham, is in the heartland of this traditional African-American music, which is characterized by close harmony and a “pumping” rhythmic bass. The group has appeared at numerous festivals across the United States, has toured Africa, the Caribbean and Australia as well as performing in France as ambassadors of Alabama traditional culture.

Tom Wolfe

Tom Wolfe is director of the Jazz Studies Program and Associate Dean of Humanities and Fine Arts in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. He began playing guitar at six years of age and has been performing professionally since the age of 17. Wolfe studied at Eastman School of Music in New York, is considered one of the top jazz guitarists and educators in the Southeastern United States, and is in constant demand as a performer in jazz clubs and festivals or as a sideman for touring artists. He was appointed to the Kennedy Center/USIA Jazz Ambassador program and toured several countries in West and North Africa, performing concerts and giving master classes.

Bobby Horton

Bobby Horton is a music historian, composer, arranger and talented performer of traditional American music. He has collected and performs with an assortment of musical instruments, including brass and percussion pieces, whistles and stringed instruments—banjo, guitar, fiddle and acoustic bass. An interest in the history of the American Civil War led him to study the music of that time. He recorded the tunes, which grew into his extensive contributions to many Ken Burns documentary film projects: The Civil War, Baseball, Thomas Jefferson, Lewis and Clark, and Frank Lloyd Wright. His 14-volume series of music from “The War Between the States” has been broadly acclaimed. It has been said, “He understands the Soul of American Music.”

Kent DuChaine

Kent DuChaine travels with the battered 1934 National steel guitar he calls “Leadbessie,” strung with extra heavy strings to handle his powerful style and slide technique. He is a blues man who has devoted his life to the music of America’s Mississippi Delta. DuChaine discovered that music listening to a Robert Johnson album, followed by Muddy Waters, Lightening Hopkins and T-Bone Walker. He moved to Alabama and established a partnership with legendary blues man Johnny Shines. They traveled all over North America, performing for three years until Shines’ death in 1992. Today DuChaine’s solo career continues to take him around North America and to Europe and Scandinavia, spreading Delta Blues and his own original music.

LITERARY ARTS AND FILM FROM ALABAMA TO PIETRASANTA

Alabama’s literary culture is a major component of the state’s artistic expression. During the inaugural Alabama/Italy Cultural Exchange, we feature Alabama’s best-known work of fiction: *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee of Monroeville, Alabama. The influence of Miss Lee’s groundbreaking novel as a parable of justice and a precursor of the Civil Rights Movement is widely acknowledged.

In the twentieth century, many Alabama writers made names for themselves, but perhaps none has had the lasting impact as Miss Lee’s novel about a small Alabama town in the 1930’s where, through the young eyes of Scout and Jem Finch, Harper Lee explores with rich humor and unswerving honesty the irrationality of adult attitudes toward race and class in the Deep South of the 1930s. The conscience of a town steeped in prejudice, violence, and hypocrisy is pricked by the stamina and quiet heroism of one man’s struggle for justice.

Author Harper Lee was born in 1926 in Monroeville, Alabama. She attended the local schools and studied law at the University of Alabama. Published in 1960, the novel was a best seller and went on to receive the Pulitzer Prize, one of the highest honors an American work can receive. Now translated into more than 40 languages, with more than thirty million copies in print, *To Kill a Mockingbird* continues to find readers and to inspire other writers.

Issues of race relations in the contemporary South are still prevalent themes in works of poetry and fiction by Alabama writers. Obviously, these works bear the influence of Miss Lee's thought. Perhaps more than any other artists, writers are able to debate issues of race relations and justice in their dramatic portrayals of human actions, thoughts, fears, and moments of transcendence.

To honor Alabama writers, since 1998, the Alabama Writers' Forum has presented the annual Harper Lee Award to a selected Distinguished Writer of the Year. An anthology of works by these recipients, *Gather Up Our Voices*, has recently been published.

FILM

During the inaugural Alabama / Italy Cultural Exchange, five films adapted from Alabama writers' books, or written by Alabamians, will be screened.

The Long Walk Home, with original screenplay by John Corts of Montgomery, Alabama, chronicles the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which is widely considered to be the seminal event of the American Civil Rights Movement. It tells the story of 1955 Montgomery, Alabama, the community struggle, and the decisions of two women, black and white, whose daily lives are directly impacted by the events. The film opened in 1991 and was directed by Richard Pearce and stars Sissy Spacek and Whoopi Goldberg.

The film, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, based on the 1960 Pulitzer-prize winning novel by Harper Lee of Monroeville, Alabama, was directed by Robert Mulligan and opened in 1962 starring Gregory Peck as Atticus Finch and Mary Badham as Scout, his daughter. Considered an American film classic, *To Kill A Mockingbird* is set in the rural American south during the depths of the Depression, and features two children watching as their principled father takes a stand against intolerance.

The film *Fried Green Tomatoes*, was adapted by Fannie Flagg, a native of Birmingham, Alabama, from her novel *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café*. Directed by Jon Avenet, the film tells the story of Evelyn Couch who, while visiting relatives in a nursing home, meets Ninny Threadgoode, an outgoing old woman who tells her the story of Idgie Threadgoode, a young woman in 1920's Alabama. The film stars Kathy Bates, Mary Stuart Masterson, Mary-Louise Parker, Jessica Tandy, Cicely Tyson, and Chris O'Donnell.

Birmingham Alabama native Daniel Wallace's debut novel *Big Fish* was adapted for the screen by John August and directed by Tim Burton. Unique to the other Alabama films in this series, the entire film was shot in and around Montgomery, Alabama. The story revolves around a dying father and his son, who re-creates his father's elusive life with a series of myths and legends by piecing together the stories he has gathered over the years. The film's all-star cast includes Ewan McGregor, Albert Finney, Billy Crudup, Jessica Lange, Helena Bonham Carter, Robert Guillaume, Marion Cotillard, and Steve Buscemi.

The 1994 film *Forrest Gump*, based on the best-selling novel by Winston Groom of Point Clear, Alabama, was directed by Robert Zemeckis and stars Tom Hanks. While sitting on a bus stop, Gump tells his life story to anyone who would like to listen. By sheer fate, he has been present at some of the most important events of American history during his lifetime, but because of his low I.Q. is unaware of them. In addition to Hanks, the film stars Robin Wright Penn, Gary Sinise, Mykelti Williamson, and Sally Field. It won six Academy Awards including Best Actor, Best Director, Best Picture, and Best Cinematography.